

West Alabama Regional Workforce Development Plan



Region 3 Workforce Development Council
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Introduction

Employers continue to be challenged in a dynamic, changing economic environment. Skill needs continue to rise. Advancing technology requires workers, even entry-level workers, to have increasingly sophisticated skills – from literacy to technology to communications to teamwork to critical thinking.

With the challenge to find, keep and advance employees increasing, how can employers put together the diverse pieces of this complex workforce development puzzle? How do employers and communities face the twin challenges of changing labor markets and increasing demand for higher skill levels? These are basic questions our region has to answer.

Even in a temporary economic slowdown, communities and employers need to invest in workforce development. A **comprehensive, consistent** workforce development and recruitment system; a solid strategy for finding, keeping and advancing employees; and a dedicated effort to building the skills, capacity and experience of the workforce will pay off in the end.

Workforce development strategies that have been effective in successful communities have required a view of the whole picture and attention to the many complex pieces that make up a market-driven, customer-focused workforce system. Internally, successful employers have focused considerable attention on the skills challenge, examining various pieces of the workforce continuum, from recruiting and hiring to training, retaining and advancing.

Forward-thinking communities and regions have recognized that successful economic development goes hand-in-hand with a well-functioning workforce development system, and that these are interdependent strategies. Like pieces of an intricate puzzle, all of these issues and elements are closely intertwined.

So what are some of the key things we have learned about a successful and applicable workforce development system for a community or region?

1. Workforce development is a continuum and must be viewed as a long term, managed process with consistent focus. The foundation of workforce development must be laid in early childhood education, proceed through formal K-16 education, and continue with lifelong learning.
2. Economic and workforce development strategies must be integrated and mutually reinforced. Economic development regions – whether local, multi-community, multi-state, or urban-rural – must plan for future business and skill needs. Workforce development must be geared to meet the employment needs of both today's and tomorrow's employers, for current and future jobs.
3. Third, partnerships and collaboration among the public, private and nonprofit sectors are essential to successfully establish, build and sustain workforce and economic development systems.
4. Employers require accurate, comprehensive and up-to-the-minute labor market information to meet employment needs. Collecting and communicating labor market information such as wage and benefits surveys, job trends, skill availability and other data is an essential, yet often neglected function that has a significant impact on the success of new strategies, partnerships and initiatives.

5. An efficient management system to connect all resources available for workforce development is essential. A program-driven approach will not sustain this effort – it has to be a systemic and integrated approach through and among the public, private and non-profit sectors.
6. A central point to facilitate connecting activities among all employers, potential employees, educational entities and service providers in the region must exist. It is essential to get past “turf issues” and look past traditional and often parochial attitudes, to establish an integrated, market-driven system.
7. There must be a process for implementing the delivery of employment and related services, including assessment, targeted instruction, training, and placement.
8. Accountability to ensure all resources and initiatives are being implemented and managed in a cost-effective, efficient manner is essential. Establishment of a business-driven, customer-driven management board that provides an efficient support system for coordination and accountability is an essential element.
9. There must be a commitment to contribute to minimizing and/or elimination of duplication and inefficient use of resources available for workforce development.
10. Management, authority and accountability are most effective and achieved at local and regional levels, rather than continued reliance on a state-driven system.
11. Workforce development must be an employer-led, customer-driven system that provides coordination for the delivery of employment and related elements, including assessment, training and targeted instruction, placement, recruitment, employer relations and communications.
12. The West Alabama regional workforce development system should exist to ensure competitive advantages for employers through quality people and for people through quality jobs.

West Alabama Regional Workforce Development System - A Strategic Business Plan

Mission: The mission of the West Alabama regional workforce development system is to promote the economic prosperity of our region through a well-managed, coordinated, integrated quality support services for employers and job seekers at all levels.

Purpose: Establish, implement and sustain a comprehensive, integrated workforce delivery system that expands economic development and workforce capacity in West Alabama.

Objectives: Provide efficient, full-time management of all sources and resources available for workforce development for the Tuscaloosa County-West Alabama region.

Provide a system of coordination between public and private sectors including businesses, industries, and educational institutions to ensure a seamless process of matching employers, employment opportunities and potential employees.

Provide a central management point to facilitate connecting activities among all service providers in the region.

Provide a system of accountability to ensure all resources and initiatives are being implemented and managed in a cost-effective, efficient manner.

Contribute to minimizing and/or elimination of duplication and inefficient use of resources available for workforce development initiatives in West Alabama.

Establish a business-driven, customer-driven leadership board that provides for the efficient support system for management and accountability.

Develop and implement a true 'one stop' center for delivery of employment and related services, including assessment, targeted instruction, training, and placement.

Provide assurance, linkages and cooperative efforts to ensure compliance and coordination within and through the workforce investment act (WIA) and the Alabama workforce system.

Administration & Leadership

- 1 Formally establish and incorporate an independent, self-sustaining regional, 501 (c) 3 workforce development corporation physically located at Shelton State Community College, and provide the short and long term public and private sector funding to support and sustain needed management structure.
- 2 Over the long-term, co-locate all components physically in one facility, including: workforce development center, employment services, career center, continuing education, AIDT, adult education, vocational rehabilitation, labor clearinghouse, incumbent worker programs, rapid response services, and other related training services.
- 3 Fund and employ a full-time chief executive officer, along with other identified support staff, to manage and coordinate all regional workforce development initiatives.
- 4 Establish a business-led Board of Directors to provide coordination, oversight, accountability, budgetary and resource development and policy direction for all related regional workforce development services, activities and functions.
- 5 Establish regional workforce consortium of business and industrial employers, education, workforce service providers, local governments and community leaders that are committed to providing high-quality services that meet the labor market needs of employers and residents in our economic region. The workforce system must consistently focus on being the key point of collaboration and leadership for these concerns as well as execution of actions needed to achieve this objective and hold all partners accountable.
- 6 Insure alignment of all related workforce development activities, including: assessment, training and instruction, recruitment and placement, communications, strategic planning, service provider assistance, employer relations, and coordination with AIDT and other appropriate workforce development and employment agencies.
- 7 Increase collaboration among all workforce partners to improve responsiveness and coordinated delivery of services. As new firms locate in the region and as existing businesses work to remain competitive, the ability of the workforce system to identify business needs and to respond and deliver appropriate assessment, training, placement and retention strategies, is essential to maintaining workforce capacity in a changing marketplace.
- 8 Business and industry leadership at all levels is essential and must be maintained for the successful implementation of a regional workforce system. The business community must 'stay at the table' and can no longer simply "opt out" of their responsibilities. Educators and service providers should not have to carry the load alone to sustain consistency and implementation of a workforce system.

- 9 Elimination of barriers, 'turf' and self-interest of individual components should be addressed. All partners should be held accountable to each other for the overall success of the regional system. Every effort should be taken to minimize duplication of effort while maximizing ease of access to programs and resources for the users of the system.
- 10 Maintain compliance with workforce investment act and state workforce system standards, policies and requirements.
- 11 Accessibility to and delivery of a full-range of employment and workforce support services will be required to maintain a viable regional system, including: job listings and referrals; placement; employer support; on-site and online applications; assessment; efficient connections to related social services, 'soft skills' training, career readiness, literacy services, dislocated and incumbent workers programs and others.

Budget & Financial Resources

- 1 Develop financial resources plan and aggressively seek funding and grants through federal workforce investment act, federal departments of labor and education, state workforce system, federal, state and local public, corporate and private foundations, and other identified funding sources.
- 2 Integration of academic, technical and workforce education and training budgets, revenues and resources within Shelton State and Beville State community colleges is required to provide a seamless workforce development system in the region.

Training & Education

- 1 Provide efficient integration and alignment among all levels of education and workforce services, including K-12, technical schools and community colleges in the region, and higher education. Consolidation of multiple technical advisory committees throughout the K-16 system is strongly recommended
- 2 Establish an education-workforce training advisory council that includes representatives from K-12, community colleges, higher education, counselors, employers and other appropriate community leaders in the region to:
 - ◆ Facilitate and encourage cooperation and consistent communications.
 - ◆ Define employment and skill needs.
 - ◆ Project employment standards, expectations, trends and job opportunities.
 - ◆ Define and apply career paths and school-to-career opportunities.
 - ◆ Enhance curriculum design and implementation.
 - ◆ Expand dual enrollment design and applications.
 - ◆ Expand career counseling at all levels of education.
 - ◆ Contribute directly to increased graduation rates throughout the region.

- 3 Foster and advocate development and establishment of a regional career-technical high school to address and achieve expanded workforce capacity and skills development in West Alabama.
- 4 Provide direct leadership, support, services and resources to employers that: enhance specific skill development initiatives and programs; expand technical skills, workforce capacity, co-op and apprenticeship programs, specialized work training; and foster technical career support.
- 5 Assess and target industry clusters to identify critical and specific workforce needs; and foster alignment with identified economic and educational strategies, curriculum and training needs.

Performance Standards & Measurables

- 1 Develop, publish and apply meaningful performance standards and benchmarks for regional workforce development efforts. Implement consistent assessment and communicate to all workforce partners and the broader regional community through a “workforce scorecard.”
- 2 Annually conduct employment and skills assessment and data collection and analysis among all employers in the region to identify job opportunities and employment projections, under-employment, skills needs and capacity, and economic trends.
- 3 Utilizing annual employment and skills assessment, enhance appropriate curriculum to meet identified workforce issues, employment clusters and technical skills. Communicate to all workforce stakeholders and general public for appropriate applications.
- 4 Continually identify and assess “best practices” regionally and nationally to insure that the West Alabama regional workforce system sustains effectiveness and “cutting edge” leadership and productivity.

Marketing & Communications

- 1 Develop, execute and sustain a regional awareness campaign and strategic marketing plan that includes:
 - establishment of a regional brand
 - consistent public and media relations initiatives
 - implementation and maintenance of a comprehensive, relevant and current website
 - application of “cutting edge” technologies to facilitate communications with and among all stakeholders and the general public
 - appropriate marketing and online materials that connect employers, education and training service providers and potential employees.
- 2 The regional workforce system must continuously assess, understand and communicate the region’s economic and labor market trends, current and projected skill needs and gaps, short and long term projected employment estimates, ongoing assessment of employer needs and related issues.

Outreach and Service Delivery

- 1 Develop and apply appropriate actions and service delivery that meet both urban and rural needs in the region, including: establishment of rural action advisory committee; effective communications network; efficient accessibility to the system; and workforce satellite offices.
- 2 Develop and implement an inventory and referral system and linkages for individuals that are not “job ready”, that have the potential of being left behind, and that have not been able to access the workforce system and job market successfully. A more effective outreach to those unemployed and underemployed is needed.
- 3 In cooperation with all workforce system partners, implement a regional “rapid response” system to meet the needs of employers and employees experiencing layoffs, downsizing, and other changes in the regional labor market.
- 4 Conduct regular forums for service providers and public and private sector agencies to maintain current and relevant economic and workforce information, enhance communications and nurture cooperation.
- 5 Develop opportunities for exchange of ideas that lead to: improved delivery of services and consistent communications among all service providers – cooperation at all levels of the system – accountability for results and cooperation - and minimization of redundancy and duplication.